NEW
NICK CARTER
WEEKLY

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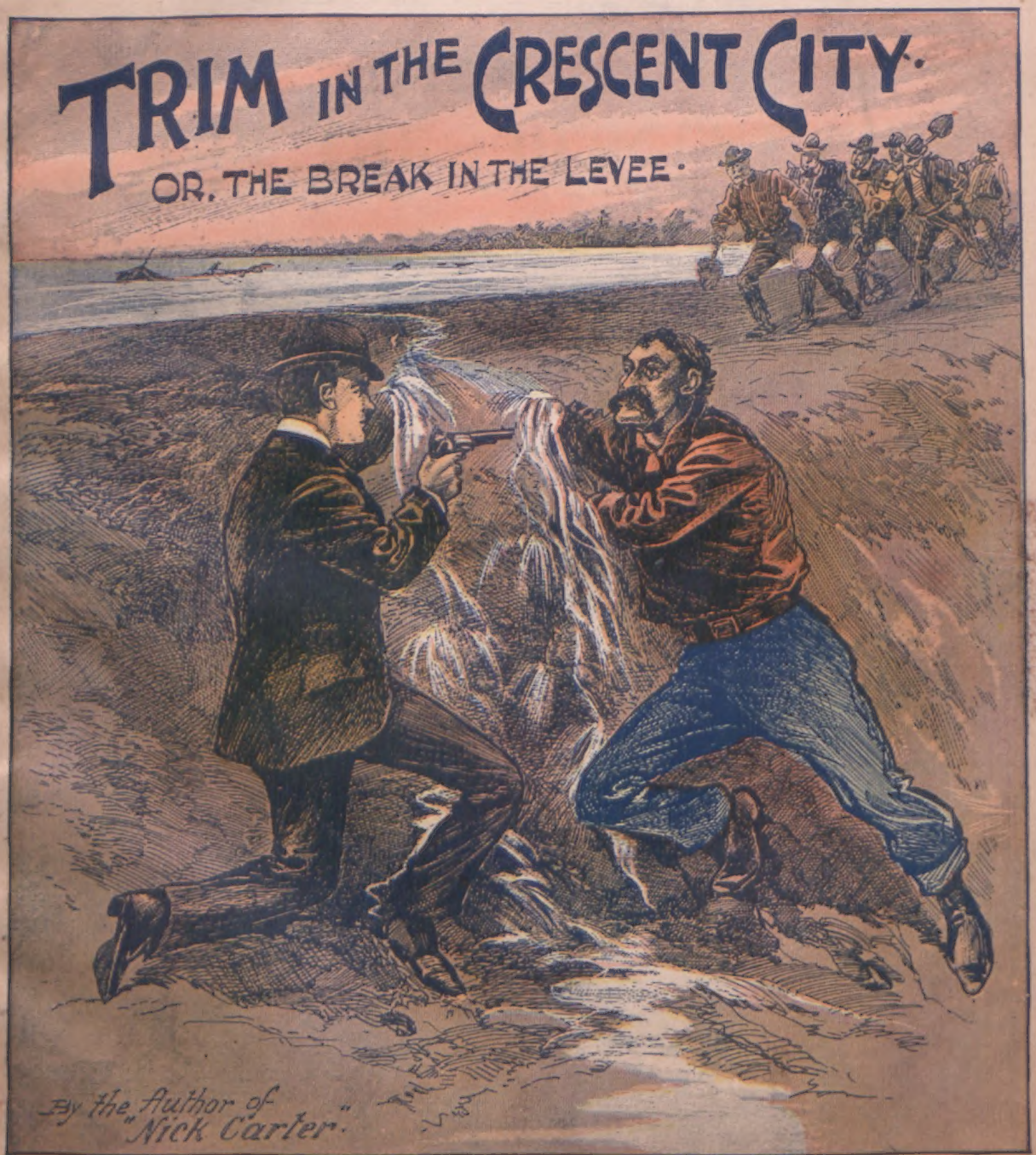
TRIM IN THE CRESCENT CITY.

OR, THE BREAK IN THE LEVEE.



By the Author of "Nick Carter."

"WE ARE IN THE SAME BOAT, SO DON'T WEAKEN OR THIS THING WILL GO OFF."

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TRIM IN THE CRESCENT CITY;

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THE BREAK IN THE LEVEE.

By the Author of "NICK CARTER."

CHAPTER I.

IN FRONT OF THE TUNNEL.

The north-bound express passenger train on the Mexican Central Railroad had left Monterey at two o'clock in the afternoon.

It was still many hours before the train was due to reach the boundary line of the United States.

It had not yet come to the valley of the Rio Grande, but was rattling along among the hills and mountains lying to the north of Monterey, that form a branch of the great Sierra Madre range.

The train was composed of two or three baggage and express cars, a mail car, a smoker, an ordinary coach and one Pullman.

The latter car was almost in the middle of the train, between the smoker and the mail car.

It was about half full of passengers. Among them was a woman and her little daughter, who occupied two chairs upon the right-hand side of the car.

Sitting opposite to them and very busy with a book, was Trim Carter.

Scattered about the car were other passengers of whom it is not necessary at present to say anything.

Trim was on his way home after a successful attempt to break up a secret society of criminals known as the Nanigos.

His work in this case has been described in detail in No. 22 of this library.

Trim was well satisfied with the results of his undertaking and had taken to the railroad for his return journey because he could thus arrive at New York sooner than if he went by boat from Vera Cruz, and he expected to find that there would be plenty of work for him to do as soon as he arrived at home.

As he turned a page in his book his at-

tention was attracted by a porter of the Pullman who was lighting a lamp in the roof of the car just over Trim's head.

The young detective pulled out his watch in surprise.

"I say, Charley," he said to the porter, "you'll bankrupt the company lighting up so early as this; there are two or three hours of daylight left.'

"Huh, huh," chuckled the porter. "Reckon you don't find no daylight in about ten minutes, sah!"

"What's going to happen? Is there an eclipse of the sun on the progamme?"

The porter chuckled again.

"There won't be no sun where you is gwine, sah!" he exclaimed.

"Oh," said Trim, "we're going to go through a tunnel, are we?"

"Yes, sah, we's near the great Texuca tunnel and after we done get t'rough dat we put out the lights again."

Trim nodded and again turned his attention to the book, while the porter passed on.

After a moment the detective laid aside his book and looked out of the window.

Upon the right-hand side of the train was a steep hillside which shut out all view except the bare wall of rock by which the train was rushing.

On Trim's side, however, the hill fell away into a deep chasm that grew deeper and deeper as the train advanced.

"I'd like to roll a rock down that slope," thought Trim, "I'll bet it would make the sparks fly; so would this car if it took a fancy to rolling down there, but excuse me from being a passenger on any such trip."

Just then the car swayed a little as the train began to round a curve, and looking ahead, Trim could see less than half a mile away, the black mouth of the tunnel.

He picked up his book and glanced at the car lamp to see whether he were sitting so that its light would enable him to read while passing underneath the mountain; then there was a shrill shriek from the locomotive.

"I wonder," thought Trim, "if it is the custom on this road as it is in England, to warn passengers by a whistle that the train is approaching a tunnel?"

He looked around to see whether passengers were closing windows or preparing in any other way for entering the tunnel.

His wondering on that matter turned suddenly to more serious thoughts, for as the sound of the whistle ceased the train began to shake and jolt showing that the brakes had been applied.

It seemed as if the engineer had not only put on brakes, but reversed steam, so rapidly did the train slacken its speed and so violently did it jump along the rails.

The lady in the chair across the aisle from Trim gave a little cry of fright.

"There's nothing wrong, madam," Trim began in an effort to calm her, when the lie was given to his words by such an increased jolting that it was clear that the car had left the rails and was bumping over the sleepers.

An instant later, in fact almost at the same time, there was a terrible shock as the entire train came to a sudden standstill.

Passengers were thrown from their chairs to the floor, windows were broken by the shock, and above the terrified cries of men and women there was heard the terrible grinding noise as the different cars surged against each other.

It is one thing for a train to stop going forward suddenly but another for it to stand absolutely still after such a stop.

The force with which it has been going is too great to be overcome at once and the result usually is, as it was in this case, that the cars break from their couplings and fall sideways from the tracks.

The Pullman, in the very middle of

he train, acted as if it had been squeezed out of its position by the cars in front pushing one way and the cars behind pushing in another.

It fairly jumped over the sleepers and began to plunge down the embankment into the chasm.

Trim, who had been thrown forward into the vacant chair in front of the one he had been sitting in, tried to keep his balance by grasping at the window sash.

As he did so he wondered how far the car would roll down the hillside. Then the little girl who had been sitting with her mother across the aisle came tumbling toward him and he caught her with one arm thus preventing her from plunging head foremost through the window.

The mother, who had been thrown to her knees, was clinging to her chair to keep from sliding further down.

After one terrible instant of crunching against the rocks on the slope the car settled partly upon its side.

It was prevented by a big bowlder from going further down the chasm.

Trim saw that this was the situation and his lips parted to say something encouraging to his fellow passengers, when he became aware of another and equally terrible danger.

The smoking car behind the Pullman had followed the latter from the tracks.

The couplings had been broken at the first shock and as the Pullman went over the embankment, the smoker rushed on to the top of the car.

Its forward trucks were even now grinding along on the roof and when they had gone about half the length of the Pullman, the weight became too great and the roof gave way.

Down came splintered boards and broken joists with a shower of glass from the ventilators and lamps.

The wheels of the truck were in plain view above Trim and so near that the could have touched them if he had stood upright and reached out his hand.

They came just so far and then stopped. The wreck was complete but the danger was greater if possible than before.

The lighted lamps had been knocked from their fastenings.

One at the further end of the car had been put out in the collision and its oil was now streaming harmlessly over chairs and curtains.

It was harmless as long as no fire reached it, but if so much as a spark should catch in the wreck, escape would be hopeless.

The lamp which had hung nearly over Trim had come down with a crash.

Its own flame had gone out but it had set fire to a curtain on the way.

Trim saw this at the same instant that he saw that the mother of the child, whom he still held in his arm, had been imprisoned between her chair and a portion of the car roof that had been crushed down upon her.

She was screaming wildly, but at the first glance, Trim believed that she was more frightened than hurt.

"I'll help you in a minute, madam," he shouted. "I've got to attend to this fire first."

Placing the little child upon the floor of the car so that she could be braced against a chair, he turned around with some difficulty for the floor was slanting steeply, and tried to beat out the burning curtain with his hands.

It was a hopeless experiment. The flames had made too much headway, so he caught the burning cloth and tore it from the rod to which it was fastened; then kicking the window open, which was almost under him, he threw the burning curtain several feet from the car. There it burned itself out harmlessly.

After this, Trim went at the few cinders that were threatening to burst into flame within the car, and although his

fingers were rather badly scorched, he succeeded in preventing the fire from rekindling.

He then turned his attention to the woman opposite, noting at a glance that the passengers forward were managing to make their way out through the door.

"Have courage, madam," he said crawling toward her, "we shall get you out of this safe in less than no time."

"My child!" she moaned frantically. "What has become of her, is she dead?"

"No, no!" Trim responded quickly, "if you could manage to turn your head far enough you would see that she is perfectly safe."

The child herself now set up a cry that was evidence enough to the mother that its life had not been lost.

Trim saw that the woman was helplessly wedged in by the broken roof.

It would have been possible to rescue her by chopping away a portion of the wreck but this would have taken time, and the young fellow had not the heart to leave her in her painful position as long as there was a chance that she might be helped in some other way.

After trying his muscles two or three times at the broken wood he said to her:

"If you will do just what I tell you to you can get out at once, otherwise you'll have to wait until the wreck can be chopped away."

"I'll do anything," she groaned, "if I can stir."

"Well, you can't stir until I give the word, but when I do, you must crawl backward at once. Keep your head down until I speak again then you'll be all right."

"Save me if possible!"

"All ready now!" cried Trim a moment later.

He stooped and lifted with all his force at the beam which held her imprisoned.

His young muscles answered the demand made upon them and the woman instantly felt the relief from the weight that had been pressing her.

"Now crawl back!" exclaimed Trim hardly daring to use breath for speaking lest it should cause him to drop his burden suddenly.

She began to crawl backward, thus showing that she had escaped serious injury.

"Head down!" exclaimed Trim a moment later. "Back a little further."

The woman did as well as she could under the circumstances but it seemed to Trim as if she would never get clear.

At last she was out of the way and he could let go.

Perspiration was rolling down his face and every joint in his body seemed about to break. Even then he did not venture to let the beam down suddenly for fear that that might somehow disturb the wreck and cause the truck of the smoker overhead to descend upon them.

Slowly he let the weight down and then catching up the child carried her while he half pulled and half pushed the woman through the car to the end.

They were out a moment later and beyond any further danger.

CHAPTER II.

IN THE TUNNEL.

After a question or two, Trim became satisfied that the woman and child had suffered no injury, so he left them and went along by the wrecked train seeking others to whom he could be of help.

It proved that among the passengers there was nobody who had been seriously hurt.

There were plenty who complained of bruises and others who showed scratches on hands and faces.

These made the most of their injuries and talked loudly about suits for damages, but there was no one who was not able to move about freely.

Even the engineer and fireman who had stuck to their posts escaped with only a severe shaking up.

By the time Trim joined the other passengers and train hands, it was known by all that the wreck was not a matter of accident.

A rail had been pulled up and laid across the tracks a little way from the mouth of the tunnel.

The spot had been well chosen for the break in the line could not be seen by the engineer until he was almost upon it and the steep descent on one side made it probable that the entire train would be pitched far down into the chasm.

It was a wonder that many lives had not been lost.

As they saw what a narrow escape they had had from a most fearful calamity, the passengers grew indignant at the train wreckers.

"If the company doesn't catch them," exclaimed one excited passenger, "we ought every one of us to subscribe to a purse for the purpose of engaging skilful detectives to run the rascals down."

Trim felt like smiling when he heard this.

It was not because he was on the spot and ready to take up the suggested investigation, but because the moment he realized that the train had been purposely wrecked, he thought of the probability that the wreckers would soon put in an appearance.

"Trains are not wrecked for nothing," he reflected.

"In this wild spot far from any town, the wreckers have calculated upon robbing the passengers as well as the mail and express cars.

"I should have thought they would have turned up before now."

He felt quietly of his revolvers to see if they were in order for he believed that there would be occasion to use them soon.

Several minutes passed however without any sign of the wreckers.

Trim was surprised. He could not understand why the act had been committed if the scoundrels did not try to take advantage of it.

As he went from one group of men to another he came at length to the conductor who was talking earnestly with the engineer and the express agent.

They were discussing how to get information to the nearest station.

"It'll be two or three days' work for a wrecking train," the conductor said, "to get the tracks wholly clear."

"Well, I don't know," responded the engineer, "if a wrecking train were on hand now I think that the tracks could be cleared and patched up sufficiently for traffic by to-morrow morning."

"Yes, it might be possible," responded the conductor, "but there would be a long lot of work left in hauling the engine and cars back to the track, if they are worth saving."

"The express car is worth saving," remarked the agent. "It seems to me pretty sound and there isn't any damage to the stuff we're carrying."

"That's good so far as it goes," said the conductor, "but the question is, how are we going to get word up the line to have a wrecking train sent here?"

"Isn't there a telegraph instrument on the train," asked Trim, "which could be connected with the wires——"

"Yes, sir," interrupted the conductor, "but the wires leading northward have been cut."

"Can't they be patched up again?"

"They could if we could find the break. You see, sir, the first thing done as soon as any of us got clear of the wreck was to get the telegraph instrument to work.

"There's a break somewhere to the north. The baggage man, who does the telegraphing, is now trying to get connections to the south."

The conductor pointed to a spot near the mouth of the tunnel and looking that way, Trim saw that a man had climbed a telegraph pole and was at work near the top with an instrument.

"This thing has been pretty thoroughly planned," thought the detective; "the wreckers have tried to prevent the arrival of assistance and their plan probably is to wait until nightfall and then make a raid upon the helpless passengers and rob the express and mail cars also."

"Where is the nearest town?" he asked.

"At the other end of the tunnel."

"And how long is the tunnel?"

"About two miles."

"Could a wrecking train be had there?"

"Yes, I think so. There are always locomotives there and usually a wrecking car is kept there also.

"If we could only make connections on the wires, we could have a train here in less than half an hour."

"Why not send somebody up through the tunnel then?"

"We've thought of that, but suppose an attack should be made we'd need every man connected with the train for defense."

Trim saw the force of this reply.

The trainmen suspected as he did that the wreck had been caused for the purpose

of robbery and they felt that it was their duty to defend the passengers and their property.

After a moment the detective asked:

"Isn't there usually a track-walker who inspects the tunnel between trains?"

"Yes," the conductor replied, "and he ought to be here now. In fact, if he had attended to his business he should have seen the misplaced rail and warned the engineer."

"Something may have happened to him," suggested Trim.

"That is what we suspect."

"Tom wants something," remarked the express agent suddenly.

It seemed that Tom was the baggage man who was trying to get telegraphic connection at the top of the pole a few rods away.

He was now calling and beckoning. The conductor sent a brakeman up to see what was the matter.

Trim remained where he was to ask some further questions about the tunnel.

He wished when it was too late that he had gone with the brakeman to see what the baggageman wanted.

When the brakeman came under the pole where the baggage man was at work the latter said:

"I think I heard somebody groaning and the sound seemed to come from a little way below the tracks."

"Can you see anybody down there?" asked the brakeman.

"No, but listen."

The brakeman did so and he too thought he could hear a faint cry.

"I'll see what's the matter," he said and started down the slope.

A little way down he came upon a man bound hand and foot. There was a cloth tied across his mouth which almost completely gagged him so that he could utter only the faintest kind of a cry.

It was the track-walker.

The brakeman hastily unloosed the cords that bound him and helped him to his feet.

"Are you much hurt?" the brakeman asked.

"No, I reckon not," the track-walker responded, drawing a long breath and feeling of his joints, "but I thought I should never make you hear."

"How long have you been here?" asked the brakeman.

"More than an hour. It seems like half a day, but of course it isn't as long as that, for I came though the tunnel at the regular time. Was anybody killed?"

"No," the brakeman answered, "it was a narrow escape, but everyobdy got out of it all right."

The track-walker said nothing in response to this, but began to climb the bank to the tracks.

"How many were there?" asked the brakeman, referring of course to the wreckers who had assaulted and bound the track-walker.

"I don't know," was the reply, "but there were a good many. There were enough to do me, you see."

"Yes, that's plain enough."

Talking in this way the two came back to the spot where the conductor and the others were standing.

There the track-walker told his story, which need not be repeated in detail.

He said he was attacked just before he got to the mouth of the tunnel and as he was still in the darkness of the shaft he couldn't recognize his assailants.

They bound and gagged him and rolled him down the bank, and that was all he knew about it.

He told how he had suffered great terror as he lay there lest the north-bound express should be wrecked and everybody on board killed.

The baggageman had not yet succeeded in making connections with his telegraphic instrument so as to get word either up or down the line.

"We shall have to send through the tunnel to Texuca," said the conductor. "I suppose you'll go, won't you?"

He addressed this question to the track-walker. The latter shook his head doubtfully.

"I don't mind going through the tunnel," he said, "but I do object to walking straight into a den of wild beasts."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that the fellows who did this job went back into the tunnel after they had ripped up the rail and laid it across the track."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Yes. I could not see them but I

heard their voices and I'm sure that that is where they went.

"They may be in there now and they'll certainly make it hot for anybody that tries to go through."

The conductor looked grave.

"It's a pretty difficult situation," he muttered. "We need men to defend the train in case of attack, but somebody has got to go through that tunnel and I must say I hate to ask any one to take the risk of coming across those fellows in the darkness there."

"They took my weapons away from me," the track walker said, "or I wouldn't mind it so much."

"I can fit you out with a revolver," remarked the express agent and he promptly handed one down.

The track walker took it and looked around doubtfully.

"One man against so many——" he began when Trim interrupted.

"I'll go through the tunnel with you," he said. "I don't think the train will be attacked before night anyway, and if it is the attack is likely to come from the tunnel itself.

"Anyhow, there are men enough here to make a good fight to protect the train and it seems to me the most important thing is to get word on to Texuca."

"Well," responded the conductor, "if you're willing to take the risk it'll be a good thing to do."

"I'm willing," said Trim, and turning to the track walker, "are you ready?"

"Yes," was the prompt reply.

"Then let's start at once."

The track walker quickly turned about and led the way to the tunnel. Trim followed close at his heels.

Just as they came within the mouth of the shaft the track walker turned to one side and opened a little wooden box lying on the ground beside the rails.

"We shall need a light in here," he said.

Trim saw him take two or three candles from the box, one of which he lit.

"My pocket lamp," thought the detective, "would be worth a hundred of these things, but perhaps it is just as well to save that for there may be more important use for it later."

So, seeing their way only by the weak light of the candle they proceeded.

The tunnel was double tracked and they walked between the tracks in order to avoid stepping upon ties. Even then they had to be careful for some of the ties were longer than others and until he got used to the darkness and the shadows thrown by the candle, Trim was constantly stumbling.

It seemed to the detective as if the track walker was not making as much speed as he might.

"Can't we get along faster?" he asked.

"A man can't walk as fast in the dark as he can in daylight!" was the gruff reply.

There was something in the man's manner that Trim did not like but he thought little of it; he simply responded:

"It'll take a good three-quarters of an hour to get through the tunnel at this rate if it's as long as the conductor says it is."

The track walker said nothing but plodded onward.

A few moments later he stopped suddenly, blew out his candle and turning about grasped Trim by the arm and hurried him across the tracks into a hole in the wall.

It was a place that had been hollowed out for the storing of tool boxes, as Trim could tell by the fact of stumbling against one.

"What's the matter now?" he asked.

"Hush!" returned the track walker in a whisper, "didn't you hear that?"

"Hear what?" Trim answered under his breath.

"Voices ahead."

The detective listened. He could hear nothing except the faint dripping of water that came in little dops from the roof of the tunnel.

"I can't hear anything," he whispered after a moment.

"Perhaps I was mistaken," the track walker said, "but I was certain that I heard voices. Don't it make you nervous to think of those train wreckers being up here in the tunnel somewhere?"

"I can't say that it does," Trim replied, "but of course we've got to be cautions, I admit that."

"Then don't you think we'd better go back?"

"Of course not!"

"Then we'd beter douse the glim and go ahead in the dark."

"I don't think so. That would be just as dangerous as walking with a light and it would waste a lot of time."

"But the light will give a target for those fellows if they're ahead of us."

"We've got to chance that. Come on, light up your candle and let's go ahead."

The track walker hesitated a moment but at last obeyed grumbling somewhat at the risk they were taking. Then they went on and for several minutes no words were spoken.

Turning once to look back Trim observed that it was no longer possible to see a speck of light at the southern end of the tunnel.

"Are we anywhere near half through?" he asked.

"Hush!" the track walker exclaimed and again he blew out his light and drew to one side.

Trim stood where he was.

He listened sharply for he would not have been surprised at meeting the train wreckers there.

He heard nothing this time more than he had at first.

"I reckon you're nervous," he said.

"Well, who wouldn't be?" whispered the track walker. "I think those fellows are ahead of us, that they have heard us coming and that they are going further along into the tunnel so as to be sure to trap us."

"Well, we can't help that," retorted Trim impatiently, "we've got to go ahead and that's all there is to it. Light up now and don't be foolish."

"We'd better go ahead in the dark."

"I won't do anything of the kind."

"Then you carry the candle yourself!"

"I will. Pass it over."

Trim felt around in the darkness until he came upon the track walker and received the candle in his hands.

He lighted it and held it so that its light streamed upon the track walker's face.

"I should think you'd have more nerve," Trim remarked rather contemptuously. "You can go back if you want to but I'm going on to Texuca."

"Oh, I'll go with you," returned the man, "but it's ten to one that we'll have a fight of it before we get through."

"The sooner the better," said Trim.

"I should almost think," he reflected as he strode on now ahead of the track walker, "that he was trying to make me nervous. I suppose he is really scared himself though."

As he walked on Trim could hear the steady tramp of the man behind him.

A few minutes passed in silence save for the sound of their footfalls, when suddenly the track walker remarked:

"Say!"

"What is it?" asked Trim without turning.

"Wait a minute, I want to tell you something."

Trim halted and looked around.

He found himself looking straight into the muzzle of the revolver that the express agent had given to the track walker.

CHAPTER III.

HELPLESS ON THE TRACKS.

Although Trim was getting more and more accustomed to dealing with desperate men, this situation to say the least, startled him.

A good many thoughts flashed across his mind in an instant.

He thought how it might have been possible to blow out his candle and jump to one side in the darkness and thus avoid the track walker's shot, but just before speaking to the detective, the track walker had lit another candle and that would have given him light enough to shoot by.

Besides that, in the darkness just behind the track walker, Trim saw the dim outline of another man and the gleam of another weapon.

There might be more enemies concealed behind.

Twice the track walker had blown out his light as they were walking through the tunnel; at each of these places it would have been possible for half a dozen men to conceal themselves by lying down beside the tracks until the two had passed on.

Even when the candle was lighted it was possible for enemies to conceal themselves in the occasional holes dug into the side of the tunnel for the storing of tool boxes and lanterns.

Trim knew perfectly well that at the first attempt to raise his own revolver, upon which he had his hand, he would be shot.

It was no time therefore to risk a fight.

While these thoughts were flashing across his mind he recalled how the brakeman had gone down the slope and found the track walker bound there.

"If I had only gone along," he thought regretfully, "I could have told by the way the cords were tied whether the man had been bound by enemies or whether it was a put-up job; then I would have known better than to go through the tunnel with him as a guide or companion."

The mind acts so quickly under such circumstances, that less than a second had passed before Trim quietly asked:

"Well, now that you've got me what do you want?"

"We'll take that watch of yours first," was the cool reply, "and when you have handed it over you'll take out your purse."

Trim promptly raised his right hand to his vest pocket.

"Hold on," exclaimed the track walker, "before you do anything else, throw your candle on to the ground and step on it."

"What if I should refuse?" asked Trim for the purpose of testing the fellow's nerve.

"You'd be shot!" was the savage response, "and what's more, you'll be shot if you ask another question like that."

"All right then," said Trim and dropping the candle he stepped upon it as he had been bidden to do.

The only light in the tunnel then was given by the candle which the track walker held.

Trim tried vainly to get a good sight of the man in the darkness behind, but could not succeed.

"I reckon you see that we mean business," said the track walker, "but I'll give you one little pointer to prove it if you have any doubt.

"Some time or other a train will pass through this tunnel. It don't make any difference to us when it comes.

"If it rolls over your dead body which we will leave on the tracks, everybody will suppose that you were run down, do you see?"

"I can see that that would be a fairly good way of concealing your crime," Trim returned calmly.

"All right then, we're not going to kill you unless we have to. All we want is your stuff; so pass it over."

"Will you have the watch first?" asked Trim.

"Yes, and if you have a wad of bills in your other vest pocket, you can hand them out at the same time."

"All right."

Trim put both hands to his vest pockets and for two or three seconds seemed to be pulling his money and watch out.

Meantime he kept his eyes steadily upon the face of the track walker.

"Come, hurry up!" exclaimed the latter impatiently.

"Here you are," said Trim reaching out both his hands.

In one he held his watch and in the other a roll of bills.

The time that Trim had spent in feeling for these articles in his pockets was really devoted to fixing the mechanism by which the revolver in his sleeve was made to work.

There was only one in place now and that was in his left sleeve.

It was all ready for use the moment he extended his arm, but Trim did not fire. He had his reason for waiting.

There was a moment's pause while the track walker looked doubtful.

"I can't take his stuff, Jim," he remarked, "for I've got a candle in one hand and a revolver in the other. Come up and relieve him."

This was what Trim wanted. It showed that the track walker was accompanied by only one man and it made it necessary for this man to come well into view.

After a moment's pause the other man came out from the darkness back of the track walker.

He still held his revolver pointed at Trim and the latter had a good look at his face.

Just as soon as Trim was satisfied that he should know this man wherever he should meet him again, and while the man was reaching out his hand for the watch and bills, the detective fired. He did not shoot to kill.

He was so confident that he had these men in his power that he preferred to use his muscles than to putting a bullet through them; therefore he shot so as to put out the candle flame.

The bullet from his concealed revolver clipped the wick of the candle, leaving the tunnel instantly in darkness.

At the same moment dropping his watch and bills, he lunged forward striking in the darkness at both men.

As he had planned this operation carefully he knew just where to strike and each fist caught a face.

The men staggered back under the force of the blows and one of them fired, but the ball flattened itself harmlessly against the roof of the tunnel.

Trim was quick to follow up his unexpected attack, but he found one thing against him that he had not fully reckoned upon.

That was the darkness which at the first moment had helped him. Now he could not see his adversaries.

By following up his blow he came upon one of the men soon enough and quickly succeeded in throwing him to the ground. Then he felt the other stumbling against him and at the same instant the muzzle of a revolver was pressed against his face.

He wrenched the revolver from the man's hands before it was fired and threw it away. Then there was a terrible struggle in which he had the one advantage of being sure that he struck an enemy every time he delivered a blow.

His foes struck each other as often as they did Trim, but they fought with great desperation and as they were muscular men, it took considerable time to overcome them.

At last, Trim managed to catch one of them by the throat and he instantly dealt the fellow a terrific blow between the eyes.

The man staggered back and as Trim let go, fell upon the tracks.

It was just at this moment that the detective became aware of a roaring sound in the tunnel that was growing louder and louder.

He realized then that a train was coming through.

He could not tell from which direction it came. In the darkness and confusion he had lost his bearings and besides that he could not tell upon which side of the tunnel he was.

For the moment at least he had knocked out one of the men and was now half up on his knees wrestling with the other.

"The wrecking train!" this man gasped excitedly, as he too heard the oncoming roar. "They've got connections somehow on the wires and the train is coming from Texuca. We'll be run down!"

He was trying, as he said this, to break away from Trim's clutches.

The detective made no answer but taking advantage of his enemy's confusion and fright about the train, he lunged forward and struck hard and fast in the darkness.

His blows took good effect and the man fell. At the same moment Trim stumbled upon a sleeper and went down too.

His head struck upon something, it may have been the rocky side of the tunnel or it may have been a rail, at all events he was partially stunned and for a moment or two lay half unconscious and unable to stir.

All he knew to a certainty was that he was lying directly across a rail and that the train was approaching with a deafening roar.

Trim tried to rise. He believed that he was on the track on which the train was running.

He got upon his hands and knees and then sank down again.

His head was in a whirl. There was a blinding flash from the headlight of the locomotive as it thundered toward him.

He made one more desperate effort to drag himself from the track and then sank down helplessly just as the train thundered by upon the other track.

The young detective was conscious enough to realize that he had escaped being run down, but for a moment or two he had no other clear idea.

He was dimly aware that the roaring of the train gradually ceased but he did not know that it had ceased sooner than might have been expected until he heard voices.

"It was right along here somewhere," a voice said.

With a great effort, Trim pulled himself together and managed to sit up.

His brain still reeled from the effects of the blow he had received in his fall.

Turning his head in the direction from which the voices came, he saw the wavering light of lanterns.

A moment later three workmen came up.

"Ah, here he is and he isn't dead either!" exclaimed one of them.

"What's the matter with you and what are you doing here?" were questions that were asked at once.

"See if you can find the others," responded Trim faintly.

"What others?"

"The train wreckers."

"Hey, what's that?"

"I've just been having a scrap," Trim responded with increasing clearness, "and the fellows I was fighting with were the ones who wrecked the train that you're going to."

"Where are they then?" demanded one of the men.

"They must be right here," Trim answered. "I thought I had knocked them both out."

The men searched around for a moment or so and found plenty of signs of the struggle but no train wreckers.

They picked up Trim's watch and his roll of bills as well as the pistol that he had wrenched from one of his assailants' hands and the candle that he had thrown down.

The men evidently had not been so severely injured but that they could get away.

"They're probably legging it to Texuca now," said one of the wrecking gang.

"I reckon I'll tag after them then," said Trim getting upon his feet.

"Reckon you'd better come back with the train, mister."

"Where is the train?"

"Why, the engineer saw you lying upon the tracks as he went by and stopped as soon as he could. Can't you see the red light of the rear car a quarter of a mile or so down the tunnel?"

"Yes," Trim replied, "but I don't want to get on the train. I want to get after those chaps."

"They've got a good start of you."

"Right enough, but the world isn't big enough for them to hide in. Tell me, how did you get word of the accident?"

"By telegraph."

"But when I left the wires were broken somewhere and they couldn't get word to any place."

"About five minutes after you left," said the boss of the gang, "the operator at the scene of the accident got connection with Monterey and from there they switched him by another line so that he could connect with Galveston, Texas, and there they switched to a circuit that brought the word to Texuca.

"It was a roundabout way but the telegraph works quick, you know, and inside of two minutes we were getting ready the wrecking train, so here we are."

"I see. Well, I can move on now and as I can't do any good by going back to the wrecked train I won't delay you.

"I'm going on to the other end of the tunnel and I shall not rest until I've captured the wreckers."

"Hope you may succeed, young man, but they won't wait for you in Texuca."

"I don't suppose they will. How much further is it to the northern end of the tunnel?"

"A little more than half a mile."

"All right then; they've got a good deal less start of me than many another criminal that I've captured.

"Good-by to you."

With this Trim started on up the tunnel and the wrecking gang returned to their train.

CHAPTER IV.

A KEG OF POWDER.

Now that he was alone, Trim lighted his way with his pocket lantern.

He walked rapidly, casting the ray not only before him but from side to side, for he suspected that the treacherous track walker and his accomplice might be concealed in any of the several side holes dug out of the rock for the purpose of storing tool boxes.

They could not be very far ahead of him at the most and if they believed that

he had escaped death in the tunnel it was altogether likely that they would attempt to waylay him.

As he walked along he reflected upon the wreck of the passenger train and it seemed to him that there were some very unusual features connected with it.

It was plain enough that the track walker had been concerned in it.

There was no doubt that his lying on the hillside bound and gagged was a sham, but it looked as if he had only one accomplice and Trim could not understand how two men could hope to profit by wrecking the train.

"I shouldn't have been surprised," he reflected, "to find that there were fifty in the gang for that number might hope to overpower the passengers and the train hands and plunder the express car.

"But I can't see anything to make me suppose that there are more than two and these two haven't acted like ordinary train wreckers.

"I believe there is something in this thing deeper than the mere wrecking of the train and I presume the only way to find out what it is is to capture these two fellows whom I might have shot down in the tunnel as easily as not.

"I can't say that I'm sorry I didn't shoot them for if I had I should never have learned what their game really was.

"I don't believe they're more than a quarter or at the most half a mile away from me now and with that short start they can't possibly get away from me."

Trim's success as a detective had made him confident.

As he had told the railroad men he had caught many a criminal who had had a longer start than this and it seemed to him therefore as if he would be able to wind up this affair before the day was over. It proved that it is not always a long start that gives a criminal the advantage over a detective.

It was about five or six minutes after he left the wrecking gang when, as he turned his lantern rays upon the wall of the tunnel, thus leaving the path dark ahead of him, he saw a faint spot of light far away.

He halted for a moment and looked at it unable to make out what it was.

At last he saw that it was daylight showing at the mouth of the tunnel. It was impossible to say how far away it was.

He closed the slide of his lantern and went slowly forward noticing as he did so that the light grew rapidly larger and clearer.

It did not enable him to see his way for outside light makes but little impression in a long tunnel.

Accordingly Trim again opened the slide of his lantern and let its rays fall upon the tracks ahead of him.

Just as he did so he noticed two moving spots on the far-away light.

He instantly shut up his lantern again and watched, going ahead slowly all the time.

There was no doubt in his mind that those moving spots were human beings and he believed them to be the track walker and his accomplice.

"They've probably just got to the mouth of the tunnel," Trim thought, "and if I keep my lantern open they'll see its light and suspect that I'm coming along. I'd better go on in the dark in the hope of overtaking them."

The detective had a good deal of hope that he should be able to accomplish this for it seemed to him as if the track walker would hardly dare to go out into the open light where he might be met and questioned by the railroad people at Texuca who by this time of course, had learned of the wreck.

For several seconds as he went along he saw those two dim forms moving about in the light at the end of the tunnel.

He could not make them out at all clearly and presently they disappeared altogether. Then Trim was troubled by this thought:

"If the baggage man of the wrecked train in telegraphing to Texuca for assistance said anything about the track walker, he would have said that the latter was on his way through the tunnel accompanied by a passenger.

"That'll make it possible," Trim reflected, "for the track walker to go out with his accomplice and pretend that the latter is the passenger who started through the tunnel with him.

"They'll say that they met the wrecking train, let it pass them and kept on as

they were more than half way through the tunnel when the train went by.

"Nobody will think of suspecting their story for if they happen to be bruised by the blows I gave them in the fight, everybody will suppose that they received their injuries at the time of the wreck.

"No matter; if they do take that course, I shall have no difficulty in tracking them because there will be plenty of people who will have seen them and who can give a clew as to where they went.

"All the same I wish I were out of this hole so that I could chase them up in a hurry."

It was now possible to see the rails dimly by the light that came from the mouth of the tunnel and Trim hurried on at a faster pace.

Suddenly he halted for his attention was attracted by a strange hissing sound and at the same instant he saw ahead of him a queer irregular line of fire that seemed to be wriggling along the ground as if it were a serpent.

He caught his breath with something that was almost like fear and started back as he realized what this meant.

He was none too soon for he had no more than turned about and started to run back into the darkness than the tunnel roared with a terrific explosion.

It seemed to Trim as if he had been hit by the side of a house.

There was no such thing as stumbling before the violent rush of air.

He fell flat upon his face while every nerve in his body tingled from the concussion.

If he had been facing the other way it is more than likely that this would have been Trim's last moment for then the shock would have thrown him upon his back and his skull would probably been crushed against a rail or the rock floor of the tunnel.

As it was his fall was somewhat broken by his hands which struck the ground first. His head came down upon his arms and therefore he escaped from having his brains dashed out.

It was several seconds before he could rise.

The tunnel was then full of dense choking smoke, poisonous to breathe.

"I might as well have been killed outright," thought Trim, "as to stay here and strangle with the fumes of blasting powder."

With lips closed and one hand holding his nose so that he might take in no more of the poisonous smoke, he made his way as fast as he could toward the mouth of the tunnel.

He could see nothing now for the smoke was so thick that it shut out all light.

As he ran on stumbling occasionally upon broken sleepers it seemed as if the blood would burst through the pores of his skin and as if he must open his mouth to breathe.

He knew that that would have meant speedy death and so he desperately held on as he was and ran on until all of a sudden he found himself in the open air and opening his mouth with a gasp he fell into the arms of a man who was hurrying into the tunnel.

"Good Lord!" this man exclaimed, "were you blown clear through the tunnel?"

"I came pretty near being blown back the other way! Where are they?"

"Where are who?"

"The fellows that touched off the powder."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Well I do and I can't stop here to explain."

By this time, Trim had recovered from the effects of the shock and the smoke.

He saw that a number of other men were coming up the tracks toward the tunnel.

A little distance away was the Texuca railway station and near it was a round house and a few rough sheds.

There seemed to be no village and in fact the station was little more than a railroad yard.

The nearest town was several miles away and all the people who lived near the station were employees of the railroad.

Some of these had gone through the tunnel on the wrecking train and all the rest of them had been attracted to the mouth of the tunnel by the sound of the explosion.

Trim understood exactly what had happened and knew that if he did not hurry at his utmost, the villains whom he

was pursuing would have time to get away.

Breaking away from the railroad men who were too much surprised by what had occurred to detain him forcibly, he hurried on to the station, arriving there just as a locomotive started away from the round house beyond.

Trim could see that there were two men in the cab and he was as certain as if he had been himself upon the engine tender, that they were track walker and his accomplice.

All steam evidently had been turned on for the locomotive gained headway quickly and speeding off up the line was lost to sight around a curve within a quarter of a minute.

Trim went into the station and tried the door of the telegraph office.

It was locked. The operator, like all the rest had been so excited by the sound of the explosion that he had deserted his post and gone up to the tunnel to see what had happened.

"They'll have to come back and ask me to find out," thought Trim bitterly. "I may not know it all but I reckon I can give a pretty good guess.

"I made a mistake in opening my lantern after I saw daylight ahead.

"The track walker and his accomplice must have reached the mouth of the tunnel at just that time.

"Looking back they saw my lantern and that showed them I had not been killed and that I was after them.

"The track walker of course knew just where powder was stored. It was probably in one of those little side holes near the mouth of the tunnel.

"I reckon there was a keg there which he and his accomplice broke open.

"That was what they were about when I saw them moving from side to side.

"It was easy enough for them then to take up handfuls of the powder and lay a train along the ground to some point beyond the mouth of the tunnel.

"They set fire to the train hoping that the keg would explode just as I was beside it.

"They reckoned pretty well and it was a shrewd job too for as it proves it has drawn every man from the station up to the tunnel and thus given them a chance to steal a locomotive and increase their lead on me.

"Speaking of stealing a locomotive, what's the matter with a detective trying that same game?"

With this thought, Trim hurried from the station to the round house.

It may be said right here that at a later time, Trim obtained ample proof that his theory as to the explosion in the tunnel was entirely correct.

His keen reason had shown him the facts in the case as clearly as if he had been watching the operations of the train wreckers with his own eyes.

Disappointment awaited him at the round house.

There was room in it for only four locomotives at the most.

None was there.

As he learned a little later only two spare engines were kept at this station; one of these had gone to the other end of the tunnel with the wrecking train and the other had been stolen by the criminals.

Out in the yard was a small switching engine with steam up that had been deserted by its engineer and fireman when the explosion occurred.

There was no sense in taking that to pursue the fugitives, for the engine they had stolen was made for passenger service and could beat this yard engine without difficulty.

"Well," thought Trim as he returned to the station, "they may be on the fastest locomotive in Mexico, but they can't beat the telegraph."

CHAPTER V.

THE GREEN EYE.

Trim went directly into the station and applying his pick lock opened the door of the telegraph office.

He had just sat down before the machine when the regular operator came hurrying up.

"Hello there!" exclaimed the latter, "what are you doing?"

"I'm attending to business." Trim responded. "Can you say as much for yourself?"

"Well, yes," the operator answered awkwardly, "I've just come back to report the explosion——"

Report away then," interrupted Trim, "and save me the trouble."

The operator immediately sat down and began to click off messages which Trim read by sound.

They were directed to the superintendent of the division at Laredo, telling him that the tracks in the mouth of the tunnel had been torn up by the mysterious explosion of a keg of powder.

"You might add," remarked Trim, "that the fellows who mysteriously touched off that powder are now on the way to Laredo on a locomotive that they stole when the railroad men at Texuca deserted their posts in the excitement following the explosion."

"You don't really mean that you want me to send that?" asked the operator in a frightened tone.

"Why not? it's the truth."

The operator turned pale and put his finger upon the key.

"Who shall I say is sending this information?" he asked in a low tone.

"You can tell the superintendent that it is Trimble Carter, a New York detective, who intends to capture the train wreckers if the railroad authorities will give him their assistance."

"Oh," said the operator with a sigh of relief, "I thought you must have been one of the officials of the road."

"And it scared you, didn't it," asked Trim, "to have me catch you away from your post?"

"That's about it, Mr. Carter, but if you won't say anything about it I'll telegraph all you want me to."

"That's all right then," Trim responded, "but I should have thought you would have been acquainted with the railroad officials so that you would have known at first sight that I wasn't one of them."

The operator smiled queerly.

"There's a looking glass out in the waiting room," he remarked; "suppose you step out there, Mr. Carter, and examine it while I send a message to the superintendent that you are here."

The operator began at once to telegraph his statement to the superintendent and Trim accepted his suggestion of looking at the mirror.

He found that his face was disguised as completely as if he had been at work on it with his make-up box.

It was blackened by powder and smoke so that no one would have been able to recognize him and he might easily enough have been mistaken for an official.

He washed off the dirt as well as he could and then returned to the telegraph office.

For the next ten minutes he kept messages flying to various points along the line.

The superintendent of the division at Laredo had promptly responded with an order to the railroad man at Texuca to do everything possible to assist the detective.

Trim's messages were directed to the station agents along the line warning them of the theft of the locomotive and urging them to stop it even if it was necessary to turn it into a siding and so wreck it.

A report was soon received from the first station saying that the locomotive had dashed by at full speed.

At the next station beyond that it was reported that the only siding there was occupied by a passenger train with people on board and that it would have been slaughter to turn the stolen locomotive upon it.

There was no report received from two or three other stations and it proved later that the men in charge had not dared to attempt to stop the flying engine.

While waiting for replies, Trim sent a message to New York to inform Nick Carter briefly of what had happened.

This message concluded as follows:

"Unless you want me for something else, I shan't return until I've captured the train wreckers."

The men employed at Texuca set to work promptly to repair the damage caused by the explosion in the tunnel.

It did not take long to do this for although the explosion had been violent the damage done was limited to dislodging a few of the rails and sleepers.

These were put in place long before any train came to pass over them.

Trim naturally was anxious to start northward, for with every minute the wreckers were getting further away from him.

The superintendent had telegraphed that a special train had been sent from Laredo to Texuca, and meantime there was no encouraging report from the stations along the line about the stolen locomotive.

It seemed that there were freight cars upon the sidings at every station and the agents did not dare to turn the switch so that the locomotive should smash into them.

The result was that the wreckers continued on their way, mile after mile undisturbed.

Of course there had to be an end of their race some time and Trim hoped that they would be caught in Laredo, if their flight was not stopped before they reached that place.

A telegram from the superintendent assured him of this.

"If they get as far as Laredo," it read, "they won't go any further."

The flying locomotive did get as far as Laredo.

This town is situated upon the banks of the Rio Grande which at that point is the boundary line between the United States and Mexico.

The superintendent of the division, disgusted at the failure of the agents along the line to stop the locomotive, determined that it should not cross the river even if he had to cause the destruction of a great deal of property to prevent it.

Accordingly when it was known that the locomotive had passed the last station before Laredo, the superintendent gave orders to have a certain side track cleared of cars and the switch turned so that the locomotive should run upon it.

This side track ended in a freight shed at the very banks of the river.

There is a long down grade from a point to the south of Laredo to the river.

Usually trains come down this grade without steam and in fact they have to put on brakes to prevent gaining too much headway.

There was a good deal of excitement around the station at Laredo after the siding had been prepared for the oncoming locomotive.

It was but a few moments after everything had been made ready when the rumble of the engine could be heard far up the tracks.

A little later it appeared around a curve from which its course ran in a straight line as far as the river.

Smoke was belching forth from the stack showing that steam had not been shut off.

"The fools!" muttered the superintendent under his breath, "if they don't shut off steam soon they won't be able to stop her at all!"

"What can they be thinking about?" asked another official who stood by. "They must know that we'll stop them somehow here and it's certain death for them to come to this place at full speed!"

"Full speed it is though!" remarked the superintendent. "I never saw any such speed on a railroad!"

"The engine is likely to jump the tracks at the switch!" exclaimed another.

"Perhaps so but that will stop her anyway."

"Yes, but it'll send the machine tearing into the station!"

"No matter if it knocks the station down."

There was not much time to speculate about what would happen for the engine was coming so fast that before the officials realized it it was almost upon them.

It turned at the switch with a terrible jolting and swaying, and sparks went up from the rails as the wheels crunched against them.

Most of the crowd of spectators started back in alarm for it seemed as if the locomotive would jump the rails and come dashing into the station.

It held on however and in the next instant roared by at a speed much greater than a mile a minute.

The superintendent had no more than exclaimed: "There's nobody on board" before the locomotive was at the end of the siding.

It dashed against the buffer in the freight shed, tearing it away as if it were so much paper, and then burst through the brick wall beyond and with a great leap went over the embankment into the river where it disappeared in a huge cloud of steam and spray.

There was no need to speculate about it any more.

The engine had been stopped at the expense of wrecking it and destroying a freight shed, but the criminals who had stolen it were not on it.

It was clear that they had stopped the locomotive somewhere above the curve in the long grade and after having turned on all steam had jumped off and taken to the woods.

Trim learned these details by noon of the next day; it was not until then that he had been able to leave Texuca.

The police and railroad authorities at Laredo meantime had scoured the country all around without finding any trace of the wreckers.

From the American side of the river at Laredo the railroad branches, one line going toward the east to the gulf coast and so on to New Orleans, and the other northward through San Antonio.

Without going into the details of Trim's inquiries it is sufficient to say that he was satisfied that the wreckers had managed to cross the river and to take a train on one of these two lines.

Which line they had taken he could only guess, therefore it would have been a toss-up with him as to which one he should take from that point if it had not been for a telegram which he received from Nick Carter before he left Texuca.

This message was as follows:

"Capture your men if you can, Trim, and take all the time you need, but if it comes handy you might call at New Orleans and investigate a case there that may be important. Learn about it by inquiring of Richard De Leon, St. Charles Hotel. N. C."

Having lost sight of the train wreckers for the time and thinking that it was just as possible that they had gone toward New Orleans as anywhere else, Trim decided to take that route himself and if he got no clew of the wreckers on the way, to look up Richard De Leon and see what his case amounted to.

The young detective made the journey across Texas and Louisiana in a leisurely fashion. He stopped at various points to make inquiries but learned absolutely nothing concerning the movements of the freebooters.

So it happened that several days after the wreck at the Texuca tunnel he entered the St. Charles Hotel in the Crescent City and inquired for Mr. Richard De Leon.

That gentleman was in and having sent up his card, Trim was presently taken to his room.

Mr. De Leon proved to be a young man dressed in the height of fashion and with manners that set Trim's teeth on edge.

He was polite enough in a way but he evidently regarded the detective as an inferior sort of person and one whom it was very disagreeable to meet.

It was in the forenoon but a decanter of brandy and a siphon of seltzer on the table as well as De Leon's flushed face and rather thick utterance showed that the young man had been drinking.

De Leon sat by the table with one hand upon a half-empty glass when Trim entered.

"Mr. De Leon, I suppose," said Trim politely as the servant closed the door.

"Pleashed to shee you," returned De Leon thickly, waving his hand unsteadily toward a chair.

"You're from the famoush Nick Carter, hey?"

"Mr. Carter informed me," Trim responded stiffly, "that you had a matter that required the services of a detective."

"'Tain't my matter at all, Mr. Carter, but I shupposhe I shall have to tell you about it."

With this De Leon raised his glass and emptied the contents.

"Have a brandy and shoda?" he asked indifferently. "Great shtuff to clear the head in the morning."

"No thanks," returned Trim shortly, "I'm a very busy man, so let me know about this case as soon as possible."

"It's all about an emerald," said De Leon, "worth hundred thoushand, shtolen from my shister Clara—wore it round her neck—done up in little box—gagged her—bound her hand and foot—awfully myshterious—catch on?"

Trim was so irritated at the tipsy man's stupid way of stating the case, that he was greatly tempted to drop it then and there, but the mention of a jewel so valuable as a hundred thousand dollars, made him feel that he must be patient and look into it; so he said slowly:

"I think I understand you, Mr. De Leon; your sister Clara was robbed of

this jewel which she was wearing and the robbers got it away from her by binding and gagging her; is that right?"

"That'sh ri'."

"When and where did this occur?"

"Tell you all about it," responded De Leon, turning to the decanter to pour himself a fresh drink.

Trim got up and walked quickly across the room.

"Excuse me," he said sternly, taking the decanter and siphon and placing them out of De Leon's reach, "this is business and if you're going to talk to me you've got to postpone your drink, understand?"

"Well, shee here! I ain't used to being treated thish way!"

"Perhaps not, but if you want me to do anything for the recovery of the emerald pull yourself together and tell a straight story."

De Leon stared stupidly at Trim for a moment as if wondering whether he ought not to be offended and show the detective the door.

Trim would have been perfectly satisfied if De Leon had done this for he was disgusted with the man.

However De Leon did manage to pull himself together and although it took a good deal of patience on Trim's part the story was finally told.

Omitting the tipsy man's frequent repetitions and wanderings it was to this effect:

Mrs. De Leon, the young man's mother and his sister Clara were passing the season at a country house on the banks of Lake Pontchartrain, not many miles from New Orleans.

Richard remained in the city.

One day he received an order from them to go to a certain safety deposit vault and get the emerald, the most valuable jewel in the family's possession, and take it to them at the lake.

This jewel was commonly known as the "Green Eye."

The young man did so.

The jewel was kept in a little sealed box which he gave to his sister in exactly the condition in which it was given to him at the safety deposit vaults.

Having accomplished his errand the young man had returned to town.

The sister had told him that for safe keeping she should fasten the box with the jewel in it beneath her dress at her throat.

The next morning after Richard's return to the city Miss Clara had been found by a servant lying on the floor of her room, her hands and feet bound, a gag in her mouth and her dress torn at the throat.

The jewel box and all were missing.

Of course the case had been reported to the local police and they had worked upon it with great vigor in the hope of obtaining the ten thousand dollars reward which Mrs. De Leon offered for the recovery of the jewel.

Only one trace of it had been found; this was the empty setting which the police had picked up on the road that led from Mrs. De Leon's country house to the nearest railway station.

Beyond that nothing whatever had been learned and accordingly Mrs. De Leon had written to Nick Carter asking him to come on and try his hand at the case.

She even offered to increase the reward but Nick of course was not tempted by that.

As Trim was in that part of the country he had telegraphed to the young man, as we have seen, so that he might work up the case if he thought it worth while.

CHAPTER VI.

MISS DE LEON'S ACCOUNT OF IT.

Trim did not believe that it would be a difficult or a long task to trace the "Green Eye."

Whether it would be possible to recover the stone was another question.

The account of its loss given by Richard De Leon was anything but satisfactory but it was sufficient for Trim to form a theory upon it and that was enough to decide him to work up the case.

He spent some little time in making a quiet investigation as to the character of Richard De Leon and was not surprised to learn that although he was a "high roller" in society he was not generally liked because of his dissipated habits which included a passion for gambling.

It was said that young De Leon received a generous allowance from his mother

but that he was nevertheless always in debt and that he would not have been able to keep up his expensive style of living if his hotel bills were not met directly by his mother who paid them in addition to the allowance in cash that she gave him.

It will be quickly guessed that Trim's theory pointed to Richard as the one who stole the emerald, and in fact the young detective was more than half convinced that this would prove to be the case when he took a train from New Orleans on the following morning to go to the De Leons' country house near Pontchartrain.

When he arrived there and inquired for Madame De Leon he was informed by the servant that she was quite ill and could not see strangers unless they came upon the most important business.

"I think," Trim repsonded, "that my business is important enough, at all events you can take my card to the lady."

He wrote on the card that he had come in response to her letter to Nicholas Carter, and the servant took it up.

Trim meantime had been shown into a reception room which was furnished in the most expensive style; it was evident that the De Leons were people of great wealth.

He was kept waiting for several minutes and at last when the door of the reception room opened it was not the elder woman, whom he expected to see, who came in but one who from her general likeness to Richard he correctly supposed to be the daughter.

She was a tall, stately and a beautiful girl, whose manner was quite as haughty as that of her brother, although it need hardly be said that it was not offensive.

"Plenty of pride in the De Leons' blood," was Trim's thought the moment he saw this young lady enter the room.

"My mother told me," she said, after the slightest hesitation, "that a detective had called; do you bring a message from him?"

"I am the detective, Miss De Leon," Trim answered.

She gave a slight start of surprise and then asked:

"Are you quite sure that you have addressed me by the right name?"

"I am," Trim answered with a smile, "unless your name has been changed by a marriage that I haven't heard of."

The young detective thought that this was a pleasant and innocent remark and was considerably surprised at the effect it produced upon the young lady.

She turned very pale at first, then colored deeply, seemed to choke for an instant, and at last stammered:

"No—no, you are quite right. I am Miss De Leon."

After this she looked doubtfully at Trim's card which she held in her hand.

"My mother wrote to Nicholas Carter, of New York, about our trouble," she said.

"And Nick Carter sent me here," interposed Trim.

"Ah! and have you had experience in such matters?"

"A good deal."

"I suppose you are excited by the reward that has been offered."

Miss De Leon said this with a half-concealed sneer.

"You are mistaken, Miss De Leon," Trim responded stiffly, "I am fortunate enough not to need to work for a reward."

"Ah! indeed! I congratulate you! Then I suppose you are taking up such matters as this for amusement?"

"I am willing enough to admit that I find it pleasant work," said Trim, "but I assure you that I make a business of it. If your mother has decided that she doesn't wish to place the matter in a detective's hands I will not waste your time further."

"Oh! that isn't it," exclaimed Miss De Leon suddenly, "I didn't mean to offend you.

"My mother would be very much disappointed if you should go away without trying to unravel this mystery.

"But you know we have been bothered so much by police inquiries and by the well-meant but bungling efforts of amateurs, that, pardon me, I was trying to find whether you——"

"Let me finish for you," interrupted Trim, "you wanted to feel sure that I was competent to undertake the case?"

"Yes, that was it."

"I don't know how I could satisfy you

then," the detective said, "but usually find that my card is sufficient."

"I don't quite understand."

"It's just this then, Miss De Leon, Nick Carter wouldn't send anybody upon a case who wasn't able to handle it."

"I see. Now I suppose that you would like to get to work right away, wouldn't you?"

"The sooner the better."

"And will you begin as the others have, by searching the house for the emerald and by cross examining all the servants?"

"No, for I don't expect to find the emerald here and if I understand the case I've no reason to suspect any of the present inmates of this house of having stolen it."

There was again a marked change of color upon Miss De Leon's face and Trim felt puzzled.

"You speak," she said faintly, "as if you knew a great deal about the matter; have you learned anything more than the police of New Orleans can tell you?"

"I haven't talked with the New Orleans police."

"Ah! then where did you get your information?"

She spoke eagerly and as Trim thought nervously.

He looked her straight in the eye and answered:

"I had a talk yesterday with your brother."

"Oh!" was all she replied and it seemed to Trim that she was greatly relieved.

There was a little tone of contempt in her voice when she uttered that one word.

All these little things were noticed by Trim and he believed that so far they were justifying his theory.

"If you don't wish to search the house," she said, "what will you do first?"

"I'd like to have you show me the room where the robbery occurred," Trim answered, "and tell me as exactly as possible all you know about it."

"I've told the story so many times to policemen and detectives," she answered with a faint smile, "but no matter, once more won't hurt and it'll soon be over with. Come this way please."

She led him to a large chamber at the head of the flight of stairs that led from the main hall.

"This is my room," she said directly, "and I was standing in front of this bureau——"

"Wait a moment," said Trim, "let's fix the time first."

"Oh, yes," she replied a little sarcastically, "they all begin that way.

"Well, Mr. Carter, it was a little after ten o'clock of a Wednesday evening six weeks ago. I can't tell you the exact minute."

"That's near enough," said Trim, "and I may add that a detective's task is all the harder because of the long time that has elapsed since the robbery."

"I suppose so and my mother has often said that she wishes she had sent to Mr. Carter at the very first. Shall I go on with the story?"

"Certainly."

"We see little company here and at that time there were no guests in the house; there was therefore no occasion to sit up late.

"I had come to my room for the purpose of retiring and had just begun to disrobe. As I told you at the first, I was standing in front of this bureau.

"Following my usual custom I had closed and locked my door.

"A single candle was burning upon the bureau at this end, both the windows were open but the shades were down.

"You can see if you care to examine them, that they are at least twenty feet from the ground and that there is no way of getting to them from the outside unless one used a ladder. Will you look at them?"

"Not now," said Trim, "just go on with what happened at the bureau."

"I had only begun by removing a brooch pin from my throat and had laid it upon the bureau.

"In so doing my eyes naturally followed my hand and I was looking down at the bureau; as I raised my head to resume my work I was startled by a reflection in the mirror, of an arm.

"I saw nothing else for at the same instant a hand was laid across my eyes and the arm was drawn hard against my throat.

"I could not scream for the pressure upon my throat completely stopped my voice and in fact the pain and shock were so great that I fainted."

"Garroted!" remarked Trim.

"Yes," she continued simply, "I believe that is what they call it.

"I know nothing else of what happened until many hours afterward.

"We breakfast early here and as I did not appear or answer to the knock on my door, the servants forced it open.

"They found me lying as I suppose has been described to you, bound hand and foot, my clothing disarranged about the neck."

"Didn't you see a face as well as an arm in the mirror?" asked Trim.

"I did not. The arm itself appeared like a flash for it was almost at the same instant that, as I said to you, my eyes were covered."

"Was anything else stolen or disturbed?"

"Not a thing."

"You wore the emerald upon your neck?"

"You can hardly call it wearing," said Miss De Leon; "it was in its case and I carried it there for protection. I thought it was the safest place."

"I understand, but I will ask a question or two about that later."

Saying this Trim crossed the room and glanced at the window.

There were two doors in the room besides the one that led from the main hall.

"Are these closets?" he asked pointing to them.

"Yes," she answered, "you may examine them if you wish to."

"It isn't worth while."

Miss De Leon looked vastly surprised.

"I must say," she said, "that you are very different from any of the other detectives who have been here."

"How so?"

"You ask fewer questions——"

"I've some more to ask presently."

"Ah! well maybe then you will ask as many as the rest before you get through; for all the others sounded every inch of the walls, opened all the doors, pulled the furniture about and in fact ransacked the house from top to bottom."

"Well," said Trim, "if they did as much work as that and found nothing I should say that would be a very good reason why I shouldn't attempt the same thing."

Miss De Leon looked straight at him for a moment and then said:

"You really expect to find the emerald, don't you, Mr. Carter?"

"I'm pretty confident I shall find what became of it," he answered.

Again there was a slight flush upon Miss De Leon's face and she turned away as if she were conscious that she was betraying some emotion.

"Of course I hope you will succeed," she murmured indistinctly.

"Now," said Trim, "I'll ask you a few other questions. "How long had the emerald been lying in the safety deposit vault before you sent your brother to get it?"

"About a year."

"You had not seen it in all that time?"

She shook her head.

"Why did you have it brought down here?"

"For family reasons."

"Can't you tell me more than that?"

"I don't see," she answered coldly, "that that is a necessary question for a detective to ask."

"Perhaps not," said Trim quietly, "and I won't press it; I'll ask you instead whether anybody knew that the emerald was to be taken from the deposit vaults besides yourself and the members of your family?"

"No," she answered, "not one."

"Did your bankers know of it?"

"All they knew would be the fact that my brother went to the vault with an order for the gem."

"Had you ever spoken to anybody about having the gem removed from the vault to this house?"

"No."

"Had you mentioned the matter to any of the servants?"

"No."

"Did the servants or any of the people who live near here know why your brother came down from New Orleans at that time?"

"They supposed he came up on a visit."

"That isn't quite an answer to my question."

"Then I can assure you, Mr. Carter, that they did not know that Mr. De Leon came here for the purpose of bringing the 'Green Eye.'"

"Once more then, Miss De Leon, are you positive that only yourself, your mother and your brother knew about the transfer of the stone from New Orleans to the lake?"

"I am positive," she answered turning aside her face.

There was a silence for a moment and then Trim said:

"I hope you understand that in dealing with a detective you are speaking as if to yourself? We never betray secrets."

"What do you mean?" she answered turning upon him suddenly and staring with wide-open eyes.

"I want to return to that question," he said quietly, "as to the family reasons that led to your sending for the jewel."

A wave of color rushed over her face as she answered with perfect composure:

"I have absolutely nothing to say upon that point."

"Very well then I must find out for myself."

"You are at liberty to do so."

"I'm sorry you won't take me into your confidence, Miss De Leon, and I'm afraid you will regret it."

"I cannot see how."

"Suppose, Miss De Leon, that my investigations should lead me to make an exposure that would be very disagreeable to yourself and your mother?"

Trim who was constantly thinking of Richard, the brother, as the guilty person, thought that this would be a telling shot.

To his surprise, Miss De Leon looked him steadily in the face and answered calmly:

"When you are ready to make your disagreeable exposure I suppose you will give us warning?"

"Certainly," said Trim, "I didn't mean a public exposure necessarily, but a revelation of facts that would not be pleasant to you."

Miss De Leon bowed coldly.

"We shall await your report with great interest," she said.

"One more question before I go."

"Well?"

"In that glimpse you caught of the reflection of an arm, wasn't there anything that you could recognize as familiar?"

Miss De Leon shook her head.

"The coat sleeve?" suggested Trim.

"I had but a mere glance at it," she interrupted. "It was a perfectly ordinary sleeve as much like your own as anything else."

Trim smiled grimly and politely took his departure.

CHAPTER VII.

FAMILY REASONS BEGIN TO APPEAR.

On the way back to New Orleans, Trim reviewed the conversation he had had with Miss De Leon.

"I believe," he reflected, "that she knows exactly who took that jewel.

"It goes without saying that she is not dealing frankly with me except that she openly admits that she won't tell me why that stone was taken from the city to the country.

"Is she lying when she says that nobody else was aware that the 'Green Eye' was to be moved? I am afraid she was.

"I wonder if she guessed that I had her brother in mind? I shouldn't wonder again if she did.

"She referred to him not as Richard, or my brother, but as Mr. De Leon; that may mean something.

"Perhaps she thinks that if somebody not a member of the family can convict Richard of the theft that it will be a good thing for all concerned.

"She won't make an accusation against her own brother but maybe she'd be very glad if I do.

"But there were other things about that talk that are worth thinking of.

"Her constantly changing color, her appearance of fright at certain questions.

"There is no doubt that I was treading on dangerous ground two or three times.

"There is some secret in Miss De Leon's heart and she was in terror lest I should discover it.

"I'm thinking that I've got to discover it if I'm to learn the entire truth of the emerald.

"Hello, here's another thought on that matter.

"In looking up the character of Richard De Leon, I learned that three or four years ago he was intrusted with the management of a portion of the family property.

"He not only mismanaged it but he was dishonest. He turned the property into cash and used it for his own benefit.

"It was as much that fact as anything else that led me to theorize that he had stolen the emerald, but as his sister and mother knew that he was not above thieving, why in the world should they have risked letting him have possession of the 'Green Eye' for as long as a day, or for even a minute?

"Here was a gem valued at one hundred thousand dollars and they deliberately permitted a known thief to take it from the bank.

"Trim, you're beginning to get new light on this case and a very pretty case it seems to be. I reckon your theory will have to be made over."

Trim's theory was not entirely made over by the time he got back to the St. Charles Hotel, but it was completely torn to pieces and he had not a new one to take its place.

He again sought an interview with Richard De Leon in the hope that from conversation with this young man he should be able to find a theory that would fit with the new light he had received.

De Leon was not in at the time and as there was nothing that Trim could do until he had had a further talk with him, the detective spent the rest of the day and evening in strolling about the city hoping always to come upon some trace of the train wreckers in whom he really had more interest that he did in the "Green Eye."

"It's just as well," he reflected, "that I can't see De Leon now, because he's likely to be full. Early in the morning I shall have a chance to catch him sober."

It was very early next morning when Trim sent his card up to De Leon's room.

After a delay of several minutes the bell boy returned and conducted him to De Leon's sitting room.

The young spendthrift had been in bed when Trim's card was brought to him, but he had risen and now sat half dressed, bracing himself as before with brandy and soda.

His head was comparatively clear however and he talked steadily.

"It must be important business, Mr. Detective," he said at once, "that necessitates your routing me out of bed so early?"

"It is important," said Trim glad to find the fellow sensible and determined to bring the matter to a head at once.

"Have you got a theory about the 'Green Eye?' " asked De Leon.

"I've got what's a good deal better."

"Indeed! what is that?"

"Facts."

De Leon's eyes opened lazily and he took a sip from his glass.

"Are you ready to make your facts known?" he asked indifferently.

"I am when you have told me more about this matter."

"I don't see that there is anything more that I can tell!"

"It will be better for you to refresh your memory," retorted Trim gravely, "but if you won't do so I will assist you."

"Go ahead."

"Very well then, Mr. De Leon, the first of the facts that I have discovered is that there wasn't any robbery such as your sister described."

De Leon set down his glass and laughed. Then he looked admiringly at Trim and said:

"Well, you're a shrewd one and no mistake! You've certainly hit upon a fact there."

"And you knew it to be a fact when I first met you?"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"What business was it of mind to throw doubt on my sister's story?"

"It strikes me," said Trim, "that it was in your interest to have her story hold water!"

"Oh! I don't know," he responded carelessly, "I don't see that it makes any difference to me."

"You're not very fond of your sister, Mr. De Leon?"

"I don't see that that's any of your business, but I'll not deny it."

"It would be useless to deny it!" exclaimed Trim, "but the fact is important as it helps to show that you wouldn't hesitate to take the 'Green Eye' if you had the chance?"

Trim was quite prepared to have the young man grow indignant at this.

De Leon did nothing of the kind; he simply laughed disagreeably and answered:

"I'm not sure that I wouldn't have taken it if I had had the chance."

"Now see here, Mr. De Leon," said Trim earnestly, "there's no use in fencing with me; we might as well understand each other."

"Very good!" responded De Leon promptly, "and I understand that you are charging me with either having stolen the 'Green Eye' or perhaps you imagine that I hired some ruffian to garrote my sister and take it from her?"

"You're wrong!" Trim responded. "I did think at first that you had taken the gem from its case while you were on the way from New Orleans to the lake and I'd thought that either you or somebody you hired had garroted Miss De Leon and made a pretense at robbery by taking from her the empty case, but I know that this isn't the fact."

"It would be a very pretty theory!" sneered De Leon.

"Yes, but it wouldn't fit."

"Wouldn't fit what?"

"Your character."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that if the gem had been in its case when you received it from the bank that theory might work for I think you would have taken it."

De Leon flushed slightly and took another sip of his brandy and soda.

"But," continued Trim, "when you received the case from the safety deposit vault it was empty!"

"I think you're right," he answered dryly.

"You believed this at the time, did you not?"

"Well, to be entirely frank with you, Mr. Detecetive, I didn't break the seal of that case after receiving it from the bank because I was pretty certain that my sister wouldn't have trusted it in my hands if she hadn't known that the case was empty."

"Then when was the jewel taken from the case, and where did it go, and why did your sister invent this robbery to account for its loss?"

De Leon shook his head.

"You'll have to find out those things for yourself!" he answered.

"I am finding out for myself and you're going to tell me——"

"I shan't tell you anything!"

"Oh yes you will; this matter is known to the public. A big reward had been offered for the recovery of that gem. I'm on the right track, Mr. De Leon, and I'll remind you that this isn't a case of mismanaging a family estate."

De Leon started and looked nervous.

"You see what I mean," continued Trim. "When you squandered your mother's property a few years ago the case wasn't put in the hands of the police or detectives; the situation is very different now!"

De Leon rose and stood unsteadily by the table leaning upon it and glaring at Trim.

"I see what you mean!" he muttered harshly; "you're a detective and you're working for that reward!"

Trim nodded.

"You propose to get it and if I don't put you on the right track you'll have me arrested on the charge of stealing the 'Green Eye;' that's it isn't it?"

"I haven't said so," Trim replied.

"No!" exclaimed De Leon bitterly, "but that's what you mean! You've got me in a tight hole; you can make out a damaging case against me and I suppose you won't hesitate to do it unless I buy you off?"

"You don't want to talk that sort of thing to me!" said Trim quietly, "I'm not here to blackmail you; I'm not here to give you the least bit of trouble if you will answer some of my questions."

"I've got to answer them I suppose!"

De Leon's hands shook and his voice was husky. He poured himself a stiff drink of brandy, gulped it down and resumed his chair.

"Fire away!" he said desperately, "I don't know what became of the 'Green Eye,' but if answering your questions

will induce you to let me alone I'll try to satisfy you."

"Very well then; what was the reason that led your sister to send for that empty case?"

"I suppose," answered De Leon, "that my mother had been inquiring for it and Clara had to find some way of showing that it had disappeared."

Since early in this conversation Trim had believed he saw an explanation of the case and all he wanted was to get one fact from De Leon, and as he believed that the young spendthrift had been frightened so that he would tell the truth promptly, the detective asked this question:

"Was your sister ever engaged to be married?"

De Leon hesitated some time before replying and at last said:

"I believe so!"

"Who was her intended husband?"

If Trim had needed anything to show that he was on the right track it would have been the frightened look that came into De Leon's eyes.

"See here!" the spendthrift exclaimed in a whisper, "I'll give you his name but nothing more. I don't say anything else mind you?"

"All right," said Trim, "what was his name?"

"Campo."

"First name?"

"Paul."

"Residence?"

De Leon shook his head.

"You might as well tell me?" said Trim.

"I don't know it."

"Very well then. Why was the engagement broken off?"

De Leon looked up in surprise.

"How did you know it was broken off?"

"I guessed it," said Trim to himself.

Aloud he answered:

"No matter how; I know."

"Then you must know the reason?"

"Quite likely, but I'd rather you'd tell me."

"Well," answered De Leon slowly, "my relatives found out that he wasn't exactly what he pretended to be, he was nothing so very bad you know but he played high——"

"In other words," interrupted Trim, "he was a gambler and blackleg generally?"

"I'm not saying anything about him."

"Was your sister very much in love with him?"

"Clean gone!"

"And is so still, I suppose?

"I haven't talked with my sister about it," responded De Leon evasively. "In fact we're not on the best of terms."

"I suppose," said Trim after a moment, "that you're perfectly aware that I shall find out where Paul Campo lives?"

De Leon hesitated a moment and then said sarcastically:

"When you've found out you might let me know, if it isn't any inconvenience?"

"All right," Trim answered, "I may have to speak with you again, but if you would give me his address now you might be spared another call."

De Leon shrugged his shoulders and silently turned to his brandy.

Trim left the room without another word.

CHAPTER VIII.

TRIM GETS THE EMERALD.

Trim paused in the office of the hotel to consult a Directory.

He found Paul Campo's name there with an address at St. Charles Avenue near Lee Circle.

As he was closing the book his eyes happened to rest upon the big frame back of the clerk's desk where the numbers of the rooms in the hotel were displayed.

At that moment a bell sounded and an index moved up and pointed to one of the numbers.

It was the number of Richard De Leon's room.

"I think," said Trim to himself, "that I'll find out what that young man wants."

Accordingly he noticed which one of the bell boys was sent up to De Leon's room and then waited around in the hall until the boy came back.

"See here, George," said Trim addressing the boy, "you've just been to Mr. De Leon's room?"

"Yes, sah?" the boy answered.

Trim twirled a coin upon the palm of his hand.

"Is Mr. De Leon going out?" he asked.

"I don't know, sah."

"Come, George, I want a truthful answer."

"I done tell you the truff, sah; I don't know whether Mr. De Leon is going out or not, sah."

"What did he ring for then?"

"He want his breakfast in his room, sah, and he's in a hurry."

"Is that all he told you?"

"No, sah."

"Well, what else, George?"

"He say he want letter paper."

"Oh, yes."

Trim dropped the coin into the darky's hand.

"Thankee, sah."

"Does Mr. De Leon send out many letters?"

"Neber known him to befo', sah."

"Would he be likely to send it out by you?"

"No, sah, I couldn't leave the house; he'd ring for a messenger."

"I see. Now, George?"

"Yes, sah?"

"You're not to say that anybody asked you these questions, understand?"

"Yes, sah."

"I'm staying at this house myself, you know, and if you behave yourself you won't be sorry, you understand?"

"Yes, sah."

It was evident from the way the boy's eyes glistened that he understood perfectly.

He knew that he was not to let De Leon know that questions had been asked about his movements and he correctly believed that if he did as Trim requested he would receive another generous tip before the detective left the place.

"Now then," thought Trim, "I may have to hurry a bit but I do want to find out something about this man, Campo, before I call on him.

"De Leon is a good deal of a fool or he would have known that I would have gone straight to the Directory to find Campo's address.

"The fact that he was so foolish as to think I wouldn't do that, makes it reasonable to suppose that he won't write a letter until after he has had his breakfast.

"That will take up a good deal of time and I'll have to risk making some inquiries on the chance that he won't send out any message for at least an hour."

Trim went straight to the chief of police to whom he introduced himself and explained his errand without saying that he was looking for the De Leons' emerald.

"You want to know something about Paul Campo, hey?" said the chief. "Anything I can do for a member of Nick Carter's family will be done.

"I know who Campo is, but he has never been in our hands. He's one of your swell fellows who may be as crooked as chain lightning, but who keeps out of police hands.

"We know him as a swell gambler, that's about all, but there's a man here who can probably put you on to a good deal of information about his life."

"That's the man I want to see then."

The chief hastily wrote a note which Trim took to an office not far away and delivered to the person to whom it was addressed.

A short conversation with this man was followed by an inquiry at a bank and then, a good deal less than an hour from the time when Trim consulted the Directory in the St. Charles Hotel, the detective started for Lee Circle.

He soon found the building which was set down in the Directory as Campo's address.

It proved to be an apartment house.

While Trim was looking for Campo's name upon the bells in the main entrance, a young messenger boy came in and began to look over the bells also.

"Ah!" said Trim suddenly, "I guess you're the lad that I'm looking for and expecting."

"Is your name Campo?" asked the boy consulting the envelope that he carried.

"And if I am," Trim responded, "I suppose that message is for me. I have certainly been looking for it."

"Here it is then," said the boy. "Sign your name here."

Trim took the boy's book and made a scrawl upon the line left blank for the purpose.

"They can call that Campo or anything else they like," he thought.

The boy of course did not look at the signature but put the book in his pocket and started back.

Trim held the envelope for a moment in his hand looking at it thoughtfully.

It had the St. Charles Hotel card in the corner and he was positive that it came from Richard De Leon.

"This is a very nice game," he thought, "between the two rascals. They've believed that it was perfectly safe to raise money on the 'Green Eye.' I won't open this letter unless I have to."

So thinking he pressed the electric button under Campo's name and presently the door was opened.

Trim went up one flight of stairs where he was met by a black boy who asked:

"Do you wish to see Mr. Campo?"

"I do," Trim answered.

"He is waiting for you," said the boy opening a door and pointing through a hall to a sitting room at the further end.

"Waiting for me, hey," thought Trim, "I reckon I'll give him a surprise just the same."

As he advanced into the sitting room, a tall foreign-looking man arose to meet him.

The sight of Trim evidently was a surprise for the man frowned and stepped back.

"My servant has been mistaken," he muttered, "he supposed that you were the man I expected to meet here at this time."

"Sorry to disappoint you," said Trim sitting down without invitation and holding the envelope that he had taken from the messenger so that Campo could see it but not read the address.

"Well, sir," said Campo coldly, "what business have you with me?"

"I've come to get the 'Green Eye.'"

Campo was startled for a moment but he did not betray himself.

"I don't understand you," was all he said.

"I presume not although you know perfectly well to what I refer," Trim answered. "You might sit down comfortably and I'll tell you."

There was something in the young detective's manner and tone of voice that made an impression upon Campo.

He looked curiously at the young man and then slowly took a chair on the opposite side of the table from Trim.

As he did so he placed his hand upon a drawer in the table and began to pull it out.

In an instant Trim reached for his pocket and drew a revolver which he leveled at Campo.

"None of that!" he said sternly, "close that drawer and don't stir or I'll bore you where you sit."

Campo moved back in his chair in genuine alarm.

"What do you mean?" he exclaimed. "This is a most unheard-of proceeding to draw a revolver on a man in his own house——"

"It was simply a question as to which of us should draw first and I've got the drop on you, see? As I said before I've come for the 'Green Eye.' You may not have it about you, in fact I don't think you have, but you'll produce it before I leave this place."

Campo stared speechless.

"I'm not going to give you time to think up any game to defy me," continued Trim, "and I'm not going to accuse you of stealing that valuable gem either.

"You obtained possession of it more than a year ago by working upon the sympathy of Miss Clara De Leon to whom you were secretly engaged to be married.

"She gave it to you before your character was exposed to her people and when she felt obliged to break the engagement, you didn't return the stone to her.

"She dared not confess to her mother that she had parted with it and of course you didn't return it.

"As the stone wasn't hers to give you have no right to it.

"That you didn't sell it I'm certain for you only realized ten thousand dollars on it when if you had sold it you might have realized ten times as much.

"You needed ready money just then and so you borrowed ten thousand dollars, giving the stone as security.

"Since then you have been lucky enough in gambling and perhaps other things not to need more money and the result is that the stone is still where you can get it by paying back the amount you borrowed on it."

"You've got the advantage of me," interrupted Campo harshly, "by pointing a loaded revolver at me while you're telling this yarn, but it's fiction just the same."

"It isn't fiction," retorted Trim; "just one year and a month ago your account at the bank was down to nothing when one day you deposited ten thousand dollars in cash.

"You may say that you won that at cards but it isn't the fact. I'm not going to try to prove that, however; you've got a good deal more than ten thousand dollars to your credit at the bank and you can at once write a check and send it to the man who has the 'Green Eye' with orders that it be sent to you here."

"I shall do nothing of the kind!" exclaimed Campo.

Trim smiled.

"That's a good admission," he remarked.

Campo flushed as he realized that his words were practically a confession that Trim had spoken the truth.

"You observe," Trim continued, "that I have an envelope in my hand; it is addressed to you and it contains a warning against me."

"How do you know that?" demanded Campo.

"I've not read the letter but I know it just the same. Shall I open it and read it?"

"You've no right to read my letters!"

"I don't care to; open it yourself and see what Mr. Richard De Leon had written to you."

"De Leon!" gasped Campo and his face paled as he took the envelope that Trim tossed over to him.

He opened it, glanced at the writing and exclaimed:

"Carter!"

"That's my name," said Trim. "Now are you ready to write that check? You needn't open a drawer on the pretense of looking for a check book for I've brought a blank check on your own bank.

"Before drawing the check you'd better write a note to the man who has the 'Green Eye' in his keeping telling him to deliver it to the bearer.

"Pen, ink and paper are within easy reach so go ahead for I haven't any time to waste."

Campo's face was pale and his hands trembled. He knew that he was cornered.

He believed that the man sent to investigate this matter by the famous Nick Carter would certainly shoot him if he disobeyed.

Accordingly he took up a pen and began to write but there was an expression in his eyes as he worked that Trim knew to mean a desperate purpose to get even with the detective before the affair was over.

"He'll try to do me in some way," thought Trim, "but I should like to know how he expects to manage it."

When the note was written, Campo passed it to Trim saying:

"I hope that satisfies you; will you deliver it yourself?"

"No," Trim answered striking a bell which was on the table, "your servant will carry it and I'll wait for it here."

Campo scowled with disappointment but he took up his pen again and filled in the check that Trim had passed to him.

By the time this was done Campo's servant had answered the bell.

Trim put the letter and check in an envelope and after Campo had addressed it, gave it to the servant and told him to hurry; then for a half hour the two faced each other in silence.

It was a strange situation for Trim was engaged with a scoundrel whom he had no desire to arrest.

He was forcing a man to restore property that he had taken possession of wrongfully and yet he had no desire to carry the man to prison. He had no desire to ask him any further questions.

"Family reasons" were to be as safe in Trim's keeping now as if Miss De Leon

had frankly told him of her unfortunate engagement and the serious mistake it had led her to make.

Therefore, Trim asked no questions and Campo sat staring hard at the detective and his revolver until the door in the hall opened as the servant returned.

As it happened Trim was facing a mirror on the wall which reflected the doorway through which the servant would have to enter the room.

Without removing his eyes from Campo therefore he could see the servant coming in with a small parcel in his hand.

"Give it to me," said Trim.

The servant did so and at the same moment Trim heard footsteps slowly coming along the hall. Somebody had come in with the servant.

Trim supposed that it was the man who had loaned money on the jewel.

Still pointing his revolver at Campo with one hand he hastily opened the parcel with the other and saw that it contained a magnificent emerald.

He thrust it into his pocket and stood up.

"All right," he said, "my business is complete, Mr. Campo."

By this time the footsteps of the newcomer were at the door. Trim caught sight in the mirror of the man who was about to enter there.

In an instant all thought of the "Green Eye" vanished from the detective's mind for the man in the doorway was the treacherous track walker with whom he had had his adventures in the Tehuca tunnel.

CHAPTER IX.

DANGER AT THE LEVEE.

Trim wheeled about and made for the hallway but not before Campo had cried, "It's Carter!"

The track walker recognized Trim even before Campo spoke and turned about slamming the door behind him.

The door had a spring latch so that when Trim reached it it could not be opened at once.

As soon as he realized that it was locked he hunged his shoulder hard against it.

The wood cracked and groaned but did not yield at the first assault; he drew back to give it another and just as he did so Campo who had hastily opened the drawer in his table and taken a revolver from it, fired.

Under ordinary circumstances Campo may have been a good shot but on this occasion he was so excited that his bullet flew wide of the mark.

Trim in his eagerness to catch the track walker had forgotten the desperate enemy he had been dealing with in the room.

At the sound of the revolver Trim turned again and gave Campo a lesson in pistol practice by a snap shot that tore Campo's revolver out of his hand without doing any other damage.

"Now then, open this door for me!" cried Trim.

Campo started apparently to obey, but the black servant frightened half to death, was ahead of him.

"I'll open the door, sah!" he stammered, running across the room with a key that he had snatched from his master's desk and in another second the door was opened and Trim was running down the hall after the track walker, calling as he went.

"We shall meet again."

The door into the main hall of the building was partly open.

Trim ran out and could hear the steps of the track walker dashing through the hall of the ground floor. Trim went down the stairs four steps at a time.

Even then his mind was busy with the strange aspect the case had assumed.

"This is the greatest of luck," he thought, "for it shows me more about that wrecking of the train than I had dreamed of at the time.

"Here will be work for me even after I've got this rascally track walker. It's a hundred thousand to one that Campo is at the head of a gang of criminals of which these fellows are members and from what I know now it would not surprise me if it proved that they were a branch of the Nanigos whom I broke up in Mexico."

When he reached the street he saw the track walker and another man running toward Lee Circle.

This other, the detective recognized as the track walker's accomplice.

"They shan't escape me this time," he thought.

He was tempted to bring one or both of them down by a shot from his revolver but it was broad daylight, many persons were passing and he disliked to shoot unless it was absolutely necessary.

He knew that he could outrun both these men and believed that it would be the best plan to capture both without wounding them.

They darted around the corner before he was more than out of the house.

When he arrived at the same corner they were not in sight but a carriage was driving down the street at full speed. Then Trim regretted that he had not shot at them.

There was no other carriage in sight. Disappointed, but not discouraged, the detective made after the carriage as fast as he could run.

For several blocks he kept the carriage in view but at last it turned a corner and when Trim arrived there it was not in sight. Then he dropped his pace to a walk and began the kind of search with which all detectives are familiar.

He asked questions of persons whom he met inquiring of them about the carriage and thus managing to keep upon its track.

He had not gone very far before he met an empty carriage which he promptly hailed. Then continuing his questions patiently he proceeded on through the city; sometimes feeling that he was hot upon the scent and again fearing that he had lost it altogether.

At last when they had come to the outskirts of the city they met an empty carriage the horses of which were reeking with perspiration and steaming from a hard run.

Trim called to the driver to halt.

"Now then, my friend," he said, addressing the driver of the other carriage, "where have you left your passengers?"

"What passengers?" the man replied stupidly.

"The two you picked up near Lee Circle."

"I don't know what you mean," was the reply, and the driver raised his whip to start his horses off at a gallop.

"No you don't!" called Trim, jumping from his own carriage and seizing the horses of the other by the bits.

"I'm not going to have any nonsense about this. Where did you leave your passengers?"

The driver was inclined to pretend ignorance but when Trim lost all patience and drew his revolver threateningly he weakened and admitted that he had left them down at a roadhouse about half a mile further on.

The young detective, believing that the driver was telling the truth at last, let the horses go, got into his own carriage again and was driven on.

It proved that the driver had been telling the truth and that his passengers having got off at the roadhouse were on the lookout for Trim.

Just as the carriage came well into view of the house the two fugitives started at a breakneck speed from the door, vaulted over a fence and started across a field.

Trim left his carriage at once and made after them. As he ran he saw that a great many other men in that vicinity were running also.

Some of them carried spades and pickaxes; he remembered vaguely that since his arrival in New Orleans he had heard a good deal of talk about the rise of the Mississippi.

People had even discussed the possibility that the levee might break somewhere and thus bring untold destruction upon the city.

He wondered as he saw these men running with tools in their hands whether a break had occurred.

He was too interested in his chase of the track walker to think much of that at the time but he did observe that the course he was taking was leading him directly toward the levee of the great river.

Trim gained on the fugitives at every stride and presently he was near enough to call to them.

He commanded them to halt, threatening to shoot unless they obeyed.

One of the men at that, turned about and fired a shot at the detective that went wide of its mark.

Trim did not intend to let him have

another try. He raised his own revolver, fired on the instant and the man dropped at once with a bullet in his leg.

The other went on all the faster, but Trim gained on him steadily and knowing that he would soon overtake him refrained from shooting.

He came up to his man at the very base of the levee. There the track walker, for it was he, faced about and made a desperate attempt to resist Trim.

The young fellow struck him down with a single blow and overpowered him without serious difficulties.

As they were wrestling against the bank that held the Mississippi in its bed a little stream of water squirted forth and drenched them.

"Great Heaven!" the prisoner cried, "we'll both be drowned; the levee is breaking!"

The track walker was so frightened at this prospect that there was no fight left in him.

Nevertheless when Trim stood up to study the situation he kept his hand upon the track walker's collar.

From every direction men were hurrying with shovels, and wagons loaded with rock and bags of sand were being driven rapidly across the field toward the levee.

"This is the spot," thought Trim, "where the break has been feared and if something isn't done in a hurry the levee will give way and that will be good-by to the best part of New Orleans."

His mind eagerly turned to the question whether anything could be done.

There was the water still spurting from this little hole in the bank upon him and his prisoner; less than a yard away another fine stream was breaking forth.

These streams would become larger every second, and unless they could be stopped they would gradually and quickly wear away the whole embankment.

Trim pressed his fist against the stream before him, and found that he could stop the flow.

Five minutes later and the stream would gain such force that nothing could stop it. Here was however, a chance of saving the levee.

He pressed his fist harder upon the spot where the water poured forth forcing his hand and part of his arm right into the bank.

Just then a workman who had been running up saw that the water was coming through and with a wild cry he threw down his shovel and fled.

"The levee has broke!" he shouted again and again.

"We shall have to run for our lives," cried Trim's prisoner.

"Nonsense!" retorted Trim, "no running could save us now if the break comes."

"But the break has come, don't you see?" insisted the track walker trying to get away.

"See here!" exclaimed Trim angrily, "I'll put a bullet right into your heart and wind you up now if you don't do what I tell you to.

"Get over here;" and with a shove and a yank Trim pushed his prisoner against the bank at his side.

"Put your hand against that other spot there," he said, "and press in as I do. If you don't mind you, I shall shoot."

Frightened by both the possible flood and by the stern words of the detective, the man obeyed.

Both pressed their hands into the levee and so prevented the water from eating away a wider channel.

Trim looked around him and called to several men who were hesitating whether they should run as the first workman had done.

"There's a chance to save it," Trim cried, "if you can get sand bags to this point."

The man saw and understood what the detective was doing and immediately signaled to two or three wagons that were approaching.

The loads of sand and rock were brought up and hundreds of men worked like demons to strengthen the levee while Trim and his prisoner held the water back.

They succeeded at length although many a time it seemed to Trim as if he should be forced away by the fearful pressure that came against his arm from the water that was crowding through.

The levee was saved but the frightened workman who had run away shouting that the break had come had carried the

news to the city and by the time Trim arrived there with his prisoners it was generally believed that New Orleans was doomed.

It was only when Trim reported the facts to police headquarters that information was spread abroad through the threatened district and a panic prevented.

Having landed his prisoners Trim hastened off for another meeting with Campo.

The flat near Lee Circle was found to be abandoned but Campo nevertheless had not escaped the detective's clutches.

They had another meeting as Trim had foretold. It did not come until he had restored the "Green Eye" to Madame De Leon to whom Trim did not tell the exact story of its disappearance.

Greatly to Miss De Leon's relief Trim did not expose the fact that the robbery was a story invented by her to explain the loss of the jewel.

How the detective met Campo again and learned more about the train wreck, is told in "Trim's Run of Luck; or, A Case Concluded Ahead of Time," No. 24 New Nick Carter Library.

[THE END.]

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